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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001144

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PREL VE
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ CLAIMS VICTORY AND SPINS UNASUR AGAINST
COLOMBIA AND OPPOSITION

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Classified By: Political Counselor Robin D. Meyer
for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. President Hugo Chavez stressed three themes in his August 30 "Alo Presidente" broadcast, which were reinforced on the government television station (VTV) throughout the weekend. First, although the Summit did not censure Colombia for its Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) with the United States, Chavez announced that the Summit's results had "met everyone's expectations" and that there was not "a single voice of support" for the DCA. Second, Chavez tied Colombia to the internal opposition, claiming that the opposition governors in the border states of Zulia and Tachira had held several meetings in Colombia with paramilitaries who were conspiring to assassinate him and destabilize Venezuela. He further claimed that Tachira State Governor Perez Vivas' support for the weekend demonstrations against the new Education Law destabilized not only Tachira but all of Venezuela and threatened him with prosecution. Third, apparently to deflect President Uribe's accusations about Venezuela's arms trafficking in support of the FARC, the GBRV released a video purportedly taken by ELN guerrillas, who were seen inventorying weapons, including rocket launchers, allegedly captured from Venezuela in 1995. End Summary.

UNASUR is a Victory

¶2. (SBU) During a four-hour "Alo Presidente," conducted before foreign journalists on August 30, a somewhat subdued Chavez claimed, implausibly, to have carried the day at the UNASUR Summit in Bariloche, Argentina. Calling the Summit "positive and historic," Chavez asserted that all the countries were aligned against the U.S. bases and that Uribe's plan to change the focus of the UNASUR Summit failed and was "without a single voice of support," demonstrating Colombia's isolation. Chavez reiterated that relations with Colombia were "getting colder each day" and were headed for a rupture.

Destabilizing Protests Must be Stopped

¶3. (SBU) Chavez accused Uribe of ignoring claims that Colombian right-wing paramilitaries continue to infiltrate the Venezuelan border states of Tachira and Zulia to destabilize the country and assassinate him. Chavez accused opposition Governors Perez of Zulia and Perez Vivas of Tachira as co-conspirators because they allegedly attended meetings with Colombian paramilitaries in Bogota and Cucuta.

Chavez also held Perez Vivas responsible for staging a "savage" protest against Chavez's new Education Law in Tachira that damaged a Ministry of Education building, called him a destabilizing factor in the country, and threatened to prosecute him. (Note: The following day, Chavez backtracked a little, noting that he was not throwing anyone in jail and that he had just been "reflecting" on the course the independent prosecutor might pursue. End note.)

The Arms Were Stolen!

¶4. (SBU) Apparently to deflect speculation that Chavez was involved in arms trafficking in support of the FARC, Chavez claimed that a video allegedly showing ELN guerrillas inventorying weapons, including AT-4 rocket launchers, purportedly captured during their attack on the Venezuelan Marine base in Cararabo, Apure State, in 1995, had been sent to him by "friends in the Colombian military." Telesur, the Venezuelan-funded regional news broadcaster, and GBRV state channel VTV broadcast the unearthed video throughout the weekend as proof that Venezuela did not provide arms to the FARC and that Colombian claims were just another attempt to discredit the Bolivarian revolution.

Comment

¶5. (C) Before he left for Libya on August 31, Chavez made an effort to recast the Summit as a united UNASUR rejection of the U.S.-Colombia agreement for both his domestic and regional audiences. His attempt to discredit the internal opposition by linking it to Colombian paramilitaries and to President Uribe, and his simultaneous threat of prosecuting governors and mayors for leading "destabilizing" protests,

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are part of the effort to neutralize and intimidate the opposition. The opposition has called for demonstrations to protest this "criminalization of protest" on September 5. In response, Chavez gave Foreign Minister Maduro the "green light" to organize protests in cities around the world to protest U.S. imperialism.

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